

Program-Level Assessment: Annual Report

Program: Public and Social Policy

Department: Sociology and Political Science

Degree or Certificate Level: Graduate Ph.D.

College/School: College of Arts and Sciences (CAS)

Date (Month/Year): July 2021

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In what year was the data upon which this report is based collected? 2020-2021

In what year was the program's assessment plan most recently reviewed/updated? Summer of 2021

1. Student Learning Outcomes

Which of the program's student learning outcomes were assessed in this annual assessment cycle?

#3 Students will be able to evaluate, critique, and synthesize competing theoretical explanations in their chosen area of study.

As part of the annual retreat, PSP faculty members and students approved a new assessment plan in September 2019. (See Appendix A). This year we used POLS 6310 as the primary assessment. (See Appendix B) We also used the written exams because students are expected to write two papers where they evaluate, critique and synthesize theories. The PSP core faculty requires multiple readers for the exam to ensure that students are meeting the requirements set out in new rubric. (See Appendix C)

2. Assessment Methods: Artifacts of Student Learning

Which artifacts of student learning were used to determine if students achieved the outcome(s)? Please identify the course(s) in which these artifacts were collected. Clarify if any such courses were offered a) online, b) at the Madrid campus, or c) at any other off-campus location.

1. *We collected one dissertation completed in the Spring 2021 and two written exams that were completed in Spring 2021.*
2. *Annual evaluations were collected from students. The annual evaluations give students the opportunity to share their professional development activities such as CITI training.*
3. *No artifacts were collected from the Madrid campus*

3. Assessment Methods: Evaluation Process

What process was used to evaluate the artifacts of student learning, and by whom? Please identify the tools(s) (e.g., a rubric) used in the process and include them in/with this report.

1. *The PSP program used a rubric developed by the PSP faculty to assess the written exams. All core faculty members identified by the student as a potential dissertation committee member read the written exams. Three students took the written exam. All students passed the exams. The assessment of the written exams was reported to the core PSP faculty.*
2. *All faculty members have access to all completed students' evaluations, which are located on a shared drive. The results of the evaluations are shared with faculty members at the September core faculty meeting. At the beginning of the fall semester a detailed report is given to all core faculty members on each student and the overall assessment of the learning outcomes is reported to faculty members.*
3. *At the annual retreat, faculty members and students, review the results of the learning outcomes and provide feedback to refine the outcomes and rubrics that are used to measure the student learning outcomes.*
4. *The Professor of the Policy Process (POLS 6310) class completed an assessment of students in the class. (See Appendix B for the plan and detailed analysis of the results of the assessment. Note: A new professor will teach this class. He will use the results of this assessment as he develops a new syllabus for the class to assess this outcome in future years.*

4. Data/Results

What were the results of the assessment of the learning outcome(s)? Please be specific. Does achievement differ by teaching modality (e.g., online vs. face-to-face) or on-ground location (e.g., STL campus, Madrid campus, other off-campus site)?

There were two findings from this year's assessment:

1. *The new rubric for the traditional dissertation for the written exams is continues to provide a great roadmap for students. Students continue to report that the rubric provides a clear framework of how the written exams are graded. However, we have concluded that a new rubric is need for students who are doing a three paper dissertation. We will begin working on that rubric in Fall 2021.*
2. *The PSP program is using the completed dissertations to assess the learning outcomes. This year we used the methods chapter. The PSP had one dissertation that was available for the assessment. See Appendix C.*
 - a. *Each year a different thematic chapter will be evaluated using a standardized rubric.*
 - i. *Year 1 – Methods*
 - ii. *Year 2 – Theory or Literature Review*
3. *The majority of the students meet the requirements for the class receiving an A. The professor reports that the capstone for this learning outcome is the midterm essay and final oral exam. One student failed to the outcome.*

5. Findings: Interpretations & Conclusions

What have you learned from these results? What does the data tell you?

1. *A new rubric for the three-paper dissertation option will be presented to the students and faculty at the Fall 2021 retreat. Faculty who read the examination felt it is imperative to develop a new rubric for the three-paper dissertation option.*
2. *Faculty members and students will evaluate the new three-paper rubric at the Fall 2021 retreat. All feedback will be included in the revised rubric, when appropriate. Faculty members will officially vote on the new rubric (for the three-paper dissertation option) for the written exams at the October PSP meeting. The new rubric, for the written exams, will be implemented for students taking the written exams beginning Spring 2022.*

6. Closing the Loop: Dissemination and Use of Current Assessment Findings

A. When and how did your program faculty share and discuss these results and findings from this cycle of assessment?

1. *The PSP program offers at minimum four open fora in which all students can attend. (1) Fall orientation; (2) Annual Faculty and Student Retreat (Fall), Fall PSP Graduate Roundtable (December) and Spring PSP Graduate Roundtable (May). A significant amount of time at the annual retreat is devoted to assessment.*
2. *At the 2020 faculty and student annual retreat, students were given the opportunity to talk about and offer feedback on the learning outcomes and rubric used for the written exam.*
3. *Based on the feedback from students and faculty, the rubric used for the written exam was revised and a new assessment was approved by students and faculty.*
4. *Based on the feedback from faculty, changes were made to the student handbook as well, which includes a three-paper dissertation option.*

B. How specifically have you decided to use these findings to improve teaching and learning in your program? For example, perhaps you've initiated one or more of the following:

Changes to the Curriculum or Pedagogies

- Course content
- Teaching techniques
- Improvements in technology
- Prerequisites
- Course sequence
- New courses
- Deletion of courses
- Changes in frequency or scheduling of course offerings

Changes to the Assessment Plan

- Student learning outcomes
- Artifacts of student learning
- Evaluation process
- Evaluation tools (e.g., rubrics)
- Data collection methods
- Frequency of data collection

Please describe the actions you are taking as a result of these findings.

- A new rubric for the three-paper dissertation option must be developed. This is a new option for students.
- We will revisit our curricular roadmap to determine if it needs to be updated to reflect the changes in courses being offered by PSP program.

If no changes are being made, please explain why.

7. Closing the Loop: Review of Previous Assessment Findings and Changes

A. What is at least one change your program has implemented in recent years as a result of assessment data?

- Based on student feedback we will make one change:
 1. We will update our student handout book which will include a new rubric for the three-paper dissertation.

B. How has this change/have these changes been assessed?

- We have not assessed the three-paper dissertation. Students are currently working on their dissertations. However, no student has completed this option.

C. What were the findings of the assessment?

- Many students have reported that they like the option of the traditional dissertation and three-paper dissertation option. However, the changes are too recent to collect any meaningful data for the assessment.

D. How do you plan to (continue to) use this information moving forward?

- Yes, we will revisit our curricular map to determine if the program needs to make changes to assess the three-paper dissertation option.

IMPORTANT: Please submit any assessment tools and/or revised/updated assessment plans along with this report.

Appendix A
Assessment Plan and Assessment of the Learning Outcome

Ph.D. Learning Outcome	Curricular Mapping	Year
Students will be able to design and execute methodologically-sound policy research that extends the knowledge of both policy and other social science disciplines. (Quantitative Methodological Literacy)	SOC/POLS 6100 – Regression Analysis and Non-Linear Models SOC 5650 – Intro to GIS Written Examinations Dissertation Chapters	Year 1
Students will be able to design and execute methodologically-sound policy research that extends the knowledge of both policy and other social science disciplines. (Qualitative Methodological Literacy)	SOC/POLS 5060 – Qualitative Research or SOC/POLS 5060 – Grounded Theory Written Examinations Dissertation Chapters	Year 2
Students will be able to evaluate, critique, and synthesize competing theoretical explanations in their chosen area of study.	POLS 6310 – Policy Process or POLS 6330 – Public Finance Theory Written Examinations Dissertation Chapters	Year 3
Students will be able to evaluate, critique, and synthesize competing policies related to their chosen area of study.	SOC/POLS 5850 – Policy Evaluation and Assessment Written Examinations Dissertation Chapters	Year 4

APPENDIX B

Assessment Plan for Learning Outcome

#3 Students will be able to evaluate, critique, and synthesize competing theoretical explanations in their chosen area of study.

Assessment Plan for Policy Process

Pols 6310

Spring, 2021

Students will be able to evaluate, critique, and synthesize competing theoretical explanations in their chosen area of study.

There are four ways I evaluate a student's progress in meeting this rubric:

1. Seminar participants are required to select a policy domain to use as their case materials throughout the semester. A policy domain is a policy arena where there are coherent policy networks and ongoing debates. Examples are health policy, urban policy, or local economic development policy. The idea is for seminar participants to apply the models and concepts that we discuss in the seminar to their policy domains. Students have weekly assignments requiring them to report in both written form and class discussion their analyses and applications of the various theoretical frameworks to their policy domains.
2. Students are required to submit a midterm essay comparing and contrasting different ways of framing issues in their policy domains. The key to a good paper is documenting how different groups frame the issue differently and how the framings can be viewed as part of a political strategy. The papers are assessed according to the five rubrics below.
 - Introduction: Does the paper adequately introduce and describe the policy domain, the specific policy within the domain that is being explored, and the importance of the problem that is addressed?
 - Legislative History: Does the essay adequately describe the problem the legislation was meant to address, the key provisions of the policy that are highlighted for analysis, and the current state of the policy (i.e., is it firmly established or are there attempts at repeal or modification)
 - The framing arguments of Key Stake Holders: Does the paper answer the following questions: Did the issue move from episodic to thematic? Is the policy category being contested – redistributive, regulatory, etc.? What major morality tale is being appealed to? How are context, numbers, messengers, etc. being used? Is the policy branch or root?

- A policy domain map: Does the map illustrate who are key stakeholders and the connections among the various players?
- Conclusion: Does the paper conclude with a succinct description of the different policy and political consequences that flow from the differing frames?

Students also present a 3 to 5 slide power point presentation to the seminar for further analysis and discussion.

3. To demonstrate knowledge of and facility with the class materials, a final class project requires creating a policy campaign using power point and/or other media to convince relevant publics and legislators that the student's policy issue belongs on the public agenda, should be framed in a particular way, and result in legislation that will achieve a desirable policy outcome. In creating this presentation, seminar participants need to be able to defend certain challenges such as why one problem definition over another; how the politics surrounding the issue can be managed; what model of policy process is assumed and why? These issues require a policy memo to accompany the presentation. This policy memo is essentially be an expansion of the midterm domain analysis, thus providing an indicator of growth over the course of the seminar.
4. There is a final oral examination that assesses the student's ability to define relevant terms, articulate strengths and weaknesses of various theoretical approaches to policy process, and apply conceptual frameworks to actual policy problems.

Final Assessment
Policy Process, Spring 2021
Dr. Gilsinan

Rubric being evaluated: Students will be able to evaluate, critique, and synthesize competing theoretical explanations in their chosen area of study.

Ways of Evaluating Student Progress in meeting this rubric and outcomes:

- I. Seminar participants are required to select a policy domain to use as their case materials throughout the semester. A policy domain is a policy arena where there are coherent policy networks and ongoing debates. Examples are health policy, urban policy, or local economic development policy. The idea is for seminar participants to apply the models and concepts that we discuss in the seminar to their policy domains. Students have weekly assignments requiring them to report in both written form and class discussion their analyses and applications of the various theoretical frameworks to their policy domains.

Outcome: Since this is a doctoral level seminar, anything less than a B+ is considered unsatisfactory.

At the midterm assessment, three students of the fifteen for which there are data had a grade below a B+ (Another student had a F at this point for failure to turn in assignments – this continued throughout the remainder of the semester, thus, with no product to judge, this student is left out of the assessment data.)

At the final assessment, only one student had a grade below B+.

1. Students are required to submit a midterm essay comparing and contrasting different ways of framing issues in their policy domains. The key to a good paper is documenting how different groups frame the issue differently and how the framings can be viewed as part of a political strategy. Building on this project and to demonstrate knowledge of and facility with the class materials, a final class project requires creating a policy campaign using power point and/or other media to convince relevant publics and legislators that the student's policy issue belongs on the public agenda, should be framed in a particular way, and result in legislation that will achieve a desirable policy outcome.

At the midterm assessment, three students had a grade below B+

At the final assessment, one student had a grade below B+

- 3 A final oral examination assesses the student's ability to define relevant terms, articulate strengths and weaknesses of various theoretical approaches to policy process and apply conceptual frameworks to actual policy problems.

Only one student failed to obtain a B+ or better on the oral exam.

Final grade distribution indicates that the overwhelming majority of students met the goal of this rubric:

10 students received an A in the seminar

3 students received an A-

1 student received a B+

1 student received a B

APPENDIX C
Rubric for Written Exam

Rubrics for Assessing Preliminary Examination Chapters

The first paper (ultimately a chapter of the dissertation – i.e., Literature Review)

The first paper focuses on the ability of the student to identify literature relevant to the problem being addressed; to critique the existing research, and clearly articulate the strengths and weaknesses of the studies relevant to the student's own project; to demonstrate how the current project fits into the scholarly flow of research in the area. The paper should demonstrate the following three characteristics:

1. The student will provide a problem statement which specifically describes the gap in knowledge that the research will fill.
2. The student will provide a comprehensive knowledge of appropriate scholarship (historical and/or contemporary) relevant to the topic.
3. The student will use the literature review to provide a framework to describe ongoing policy discussions and debates relevant to the topic.

The second paper (ultimately a chapter of the dissertation – i.e., Methods and Data)

The second paper focuses on the ability of the student to identify and formulate a researchable problem and methodology. The paper should demonstrate the following three characteristics.

1. The student will articulate research question(s) and hypotheses that specifically describe the gap in knowledge that the research will fill. The student will articulate the precise unique and intellectual contribution(s) the research will make to the current body of knowledge.
2. The student will describe the potential data (that may be used or collected) and what competing methodologies may be used in the research project.
3. The student will articulate why and how the potential analysis will impact or inform public policy.

Rubrics for Assessing Preliminary Examination Chapters

Both papers need to demonstrate a student's ability to:

- Clearly communicate in a way that is accessible to both lay and professional audiences.
- Articulate and explain theoretical and empirical terms clearly.
- Show mastery of the mechanics of grammar, footnotes, and punctuation.
- Demonstrate professional level writing skills.

Evaluation

The papers will be evaluated by two faculty members based on your proposed dissertation committee. Each part of the paper will be graded using the following criteria: exemplary, competent, or developing. For a student to pass he/she will need an overall evaluation of exemplary (passed) or competent (passed). A student that receives a developing grade will need to retake the examination. A student will receive a failing grade if he/she fails to turn in the papers by the due date.

Faculty Assistance

A student may ask and obtain oral assistance from his/her dissertation chair (or other faculty members if approved by the chair) in working on their papers. However, we emphasize that the preliminary examination is a test of the student's ability to perform dissertation research on their own and faculty assistance should be limited to oral communication.

Due Date

You can start your exam on June 1, 2019. Please email your two papers to Mary Lapusan (lapusanm@slu.edu) by September 3, 2019 by 8 a.m. Please CC, Drs. Sandoval and Cropf.